

UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

Vol 18, No. 6

February 22, 1980

Chicago, Illinois

An Educational Group

OVERSIGHT IN LAST BULLETIN

Mary Gehr reminded me of one of our enjoyable engagements of the 30's that I overlooked in the last Bulletin. I was engaged to supply a line of sixteen girls and soloists by Thaviu a European and American producer for one months engagement in the Capitol Theatre in Montreal. We arrived there January 18th in 1935 and were billed as the "Folies de Paris" (Direct from Paris). It was a movie house and we were to be part of the stage show in between movies. I choreographed excerpts from the Ballet "Coppelia" (our costumes were from Paris) and Thaviu presented excerpts from "Rigoletto". This show ran for two weeks and in the meantime we were preparing the next show. For this I choreographed "Une Invitation ala Danse" (so the program said) with "pas le corps de Ballet du Casino de Paris". The soloists were Albia Kavan, Frankie Weise, Don Roberto and myself. The last week Mae Murray the movie star was a main attraction and she danced her famous "Merry Widow Waltz" which was ravishing. For the girls I had to arrange quickly a 'girlie girlie' number in voluminous Chiffon gowns and floppy hats. It was nothing but the girls were lovely and everyone liked it about the best of anything we did there. Don Roberto and I worked as clowns that week. The acts included the famous Gaudschmid Brothers and their French Poodles. We all had to admit that the dog act was the most intelligent act we ever worked with...they were unbelievable.

The month itself was a pleasant one with sleigh ride parties up Mount Royal and other winter activities. I remember mostly the mountains of snow and the tunnels we had to walk through on the streets. It was below zero almost the entire month.

In the group were Albia Kavan (later in Ballet Theatre), Frnakie Weiss (known in Vaudeville as Jeanne Propper), Don Roberto and Marie Arrowsmith (adagio team), Kittie Andrews (La Pointe). Mary Gehr (now a successful Chicago artist), Marion Finholt and the rest I do not remember.

What I do remember was the Machinations of Boris Volkoff (whom I knew as a student at Bolm's) backstage daily trying to get Thaviu to fire me and hire him because he was then a resident of Canada. Volkoff's claim to fame was that he was Melissa Haydens first teacher. Thaviu remained my friend - Boris was not.

THE 1970's

New Years day 1970 began with a delightful day spent with the Kelly brown family driving to Tucson, Arizona to visit the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum. On the return to Phoenix we saw one of those spectacular desert sunsets that are beyond description. It was the last time we were all to be together.

Another meaningfull day in March of that year was a day that John Kriza came to have lunch with us. He had problems. Approaching fifty, a rather depressed boy (we still thought of him as a boy) as to his place in the Ballet profession. He of all our prodigies alone had enjoyed international fame. This stardom was becoming difficult to maintain due to his inability to keep working physically at his technique. the boyish charm was his greatest asset and in the coming of the "athletic age" in dance his charm was not enough. Ballet Theatre had not found a way or the will to use this talent. Much later when we returned from our vacation in August of 75 we first heard the news of his strange death in Florida. On July 5th of that year

at a dinner party for Kirsten Ralov of the Royal Danish Ballet -Johnny arose abruptly from the table and said a hasty farewell. A chill went through my spine because somehow I felt that that was the last time we were to see him alive - and it was.

Another memorable time was our vacation in August of 1970. After a short visit with the Browns and Helen and Al Wagner in Phoenix we toured through the Grand Canyon, Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon to meet Charles and Jane Bockman in Moab, Utah. With them we proceeded together through Monument Valley, Arches National Park and Canyonlands. This was truly an enjoyable week with our two great friends. It was to be Charlie's last trip but happily not our last time to be with them. Recently we viewed my slides of that trip and we lived it all over again.

Towards the end of the 60's we were able (time-wise and cost-wise) to take vacations in depth, usually during the month of August - not the best time to be 'on the road' but better than no vacation at all. In planning a trip I ordinarily begin with a place we have seen before and then add two or three new places. It is always good to go back to places one loves and in the second cycle one finds new loves for the next trip. This system has done us in good stead and now there are so many loved-places it is difficult to plan the next trip.

In Joseph Wecksberg's book "Dream Towns of Europe" we find that we unconsciously chose several of his dream towns to visit - namely: Bath, England, Avignon, France, Lucerne, Switzerland, Rothenburg, Germany, Bruges, Belgum and Delft, Holland. All were charming, quaint and comparatively small cities. For my taste I would find it very difficult to ignore Venice, Vienna, Munich, Garmisch, Florence, Dubrovnik, Toledo and Granada. Each of these cities have charm, beauty, historic interest and especially Florence is loaded with art collections that stagger the imagination..

During this decade we took six trips to Europe and the other years to National Parks in the States and the Canadian Parks as well. In the six trips abroad we visited twelve countries traveling by air, bus, rail and boat.

Several important publicity plums came our way during the 70's. The first in '71 was the filming of "Whys and Otherwise" in the studio of a class in progress. The film was directed by Alan Baker and narrated by Bentley Stone. Many of the young dancers used in that film are now firmly entrenched in dance - Karen Tims for one. Naomi Sorkins and Ian Horvath danced the Pas de deux from Les Sylphides at the close of the film. Basically the idea of the film was what to look for in choosing a Ballet School. Again in the spring of '74 NBC descended upon us for a film for Jeannie Morris' program on the Five O'clock News. Lenny Jenkins, now in Hollywood, filmed and did the cutting and it appeared on the evening news three nights in succession. Super-imposed over the class room scenes were interviews with Mr. Stone and myself. Being on the News made a terrific impression and did the School a great deal of good. Twice during the decade we had full page photographic spreads in both the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Daily News.

The past decade was a kind one for Stone Camryn trained dancers the world over. Our own programs seemed to be better than those of the past because of greater group involvement. Stone choreographed new during this time - "Gymnos" - "To the Sun" - "Lilacs Out of a Dead Land" - "Celebration" - "Party Play" - "Valse Viennoises" and the "Gottschalk Suite" which gave ample chances for the soloists to prove themselves. Coupled with my efforts - "Austrian Suite" - "Symphonic Variations" - "Capriccio" - "Portuguese Suite" and revivals of "The Singing Yankees" - "Like a Weeping Willow" and "Alice in Wonderland" the students had an added impetus to broaden their talents. During this time over thirty ex-students were in important companies over the globe. Certainly John Neumeier's reputation in Hamburg leads them all. Others were Scott Schlexer in the American Ballet Theatre - Karen Tims in Netherlands Dans Theatre - Dan Reily and Mark Trudeau in the Royal Dutch Ballet - Diane Reily in the Basle Switzerland Ballet Company - Vanessa Meria soon leaving the Basel Company for a Musical in Vienna - Mary Randolph and Kay Johnson in the Eliot Feld Company - Lauren Rouse and Nancy Glynn in the Pittsburgh Ballet - Christopher Adams in the Boston Ballet - Linda Swayze and Sharon Birthright in the Dance Theatre of Harlem - Darleen Callaghan with the

Bonnefous Group of of the New City Ballet and others are all involved in various Regional Ballet Companies. All of these dancers including Neumeier were prominent in the annual Spring Concerts.

After trying unsuccessfully to get grants since 1973 to bring foreign teachers to the school in '74 we decided to try it on our own. So we flew to London and Copenhagen to engage Joan Lawson from the London Royal Ballet and Kirsten Ralov from the Royal Danish Ballet School. Our trip was a success as were the two years they came to the school. Lawson's course was specifically for teachers and in March of '75 she drew 38 teachers from through out the east and mid-west. All were fascinated by her wit - profound knowledge and energy - her work was presented in a well thought out manner from the teacher's standpoint. The second week we had her teach our own advanced class and on the last day she gave a lecture on the History of Ballet (from the English point of view). I personally adored Kirsten Ralov's classes finding her work tricky-hard and with a certain quaint beauty hard to acquire. Her reasons for admiring the Bournonville System was made extremely convincing. The fact that so many great dancers came out of the work was proof enough for her - and me too! All were delighted by her kitten-paw feet and simple lovely arm work. Both teachers were engaged again for 1976 at our expense. Fortunately we did not lose money but broke even. We can only hope that the students appreciated what they received.

In July of '77 we did finally receive a grant of \$15,000 for the soul purpose of hiring a teacher who might eventually be able to take over the school and run it as it had been in the past. When it all boiled down we chose Dolores Lipinski trained in the school and qualified one hundred percent. This with a tacit agreement that her husband, Larry Long, would come into the picture. At the end of her first year when he should have come in he backed out. As the School absolutely required two persons the Grant failed. Dolores continued to teach for another year but then she too asked out. We were embarrassed by the Chicago Community Trust who said we failed the purpose of the grant - saying that Dolores was completely within her rights to refuse - which left us where? It all ended up just a total headache.

Somewhere in my background someone implanted the idea in my mind that when one said goodbye - it could be the last time - the very last time! And as I grow older I realize the truth of that idea. In the 70's we said goodbye to so many of our favorites in the concert field - Elisabeth Schwartzkopf because she felt it was time (she never sang better than that last concert) - David Oistrakh because of the grim reaper and Brigit Nilsson because of the IRS (however, she is back and we may still have a chance). The 70's were rich years in dance with the Harkness Ballet, Eliot Feld's Ballet, Pearl Lang's "Dybbuk" - the Stuttgard Ballet - the last performance of the Bejart Company - Babilee's stunning performance on last years Dance Festival - and our own Naomi Sorkin's solo program all gave us a taste of perfection. Larger and more famous groups were less excellent. Music fared far better at the Opera with Wagner's "Das Reingold", "Die Meistersinger", "Tristan und Isolda", that exquisite performance of "Così fan Tutti" with Schwarzkopf, Lugwig and Barry - "Werther", "Pellas and Melisande", and a great "Peter Grimes". Then we had for a few precious years Guillini with the Chicago Symphony - now lost to Los Angeles. The Fine Arts Quartet supplied many memorable envenings of Quartet Music. Solo performers not to forget were Rostropovich, Dieskau, Ashkinazy, Barbara Hendricks and Hermann Prey. There were two great one man shows - Whitmore as Will Rogers and Vincent Price as Oscar Wilds. "Equis" was the one unique play for my taste and Angela Lansbury took the curse off of that tired "Gypsy". Bergman's film of the "Magic Flute" was a real gem. During the past ten years we saw on the average of 30 performances a season and the above are ones that remain in the front of my mind.

Each year I read between 30 and 40 books and in thinking back over the past ten years the ones that stand out in my mind may not be the ten best but they are the ones that appealed most to me. Certainly Richard Adam's "Watership Downs" was a unique story of a colony of rabbits who seemed very human and loveable. It was one of the few best sellers that had appeal for me. Kenneth Clark's "Civilization" was a masterly job of telling history through the medium of art. Yukio Mishima's tetralogy - "Spring Snow", "Runaway Horses", "The Temple of the Golden Dawn", and "The Decay of the Angel" were fascination reading and

bare re-reading. Shortly after they were published Mishima committed seppuku and thereby ending a great writing career. Gabriel Garcia Marquez has an immense appeal for me and his "Hundred Years of Solitude" is a book that certainly will live long into the future. Five biographies I found very worth while were "The Adams Cronicles" by Jack Shepherd - "The Brothers Mann" by Nigel Hamilton, "Pilgrim of Progress" a biography of Hermann Hesse by Ralph Friedman, "Bernard Berenson" by Ernest Samuels and finally "Leonardo" by Robert Payne.

In the past having announced several times a Farewell Performance (the last time was in April 1957) but actually my very final performance was seventeen years later in April of '74 (so many things seemed to end in the 70's). You must believe that it was a great wrench for me to stop completely. My last appearance was in an old favorite "The Singing Yankees" with Christopher Adams, Lorraine Denham, Kristyn Koczur, Morag MacKenzie and Lynn Ziolka. That performance left a nice warm feeling for us all with great empathy between ourselves and with the audience. It was good to stop at the top - and at 71 years of age.

Ironically when we reach that point in life - a bit past the 'busy years' and we find we have time and money to enjoy what is left of it, we find that time has taken its toll on our health - fight as we may - this is one of the most difficult lessons in life to learn - or should I say accept. Both Stone and I have reached that age and the 70's have been trial years. Stone in his early years was a chain smoker and now must suffer emphysema. In 74 he was mugged which was a painful experience for him. In 78 he was hospitalized with pneumonia and now has that constant threat. In March of '72 I had a back problem that lead to a lumbar laminectomy operation and in five weeks I was back teaching. Far more annoying was the rapid production of malignant tumors in my plumbing. That also lead to surgery several times and finally ended with 40 radium treatments. The distress and inconvenience has taken a long time to pass away. Both of us lost little teaching time - even though ill - and thanks to a good business sense the insurance took the real brunt.

In a world sense the 70's were catastrophic years with the elements in turmoil and world politics constantly at a boiling point. Human behavior totally unaccountable for at times and yet there were very beautiful moments when the populace behaved with grace and good manners - witnessing the Popes recent visit to Chicago.